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HR 288 REQUESTING AN EVALUATION OF THE FUEL POTENTIAL OF ALL PLANTED FOREST STANDS

Statement for
House Committee on
Energy, Ecology and Environmental Protection
Public Hearing - 20 March 1981

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HR 288 requests the Department of Land and Natural Resources to evaluate the fuel potential of all planted forest stands and to identify and remove any obstacles to the use of this potential fuel. This statement on HR 288 does not represent an institutional position of the University of Hawaii.

While we are in general accord with the intent of HR 288 and basically in agreement with the various supporting clauses outlining the need for such a resolution we wish to call this committee's attention to the following three points which in our judgement need clarification.

1. It is correctly noted that Hawaii has tremendous potential for biomass production as an alternate or renewable energy source. The cogeneration of electricity and process steam is noted, however, it seems incorrect to state in paragraph 3 that the sugar industry will not be able to supply the potential fuel needs of these boilers through the burning of bagasse. The statement seems to imply that the boiler needs for sugar mill operations cannot be met with bagasse. It is our understanding that the sugar industry, at least on the Big Island, has a surplus of bagasse for their boiler needs and with the recent development by Theo H. Davies of their pelletizing plant at Haina, the year round energy self sufficiency of the sugar mill needs seems assured. Some 35 to 40 percent of the electric needs of the Big Island are presently produced by surplus power from the sugar plantations. We would suggest amending paragraph 3 to acknowledge that the sugar industry may have the potential for even greater surplus energy production if other biomass fuels were included.

2. The evaluation of the fuel potential of all planted forests is an appropriate objective, however, we would suggest a broadening of the scope of this evaluation, and a carefully worded definition of "planted" forests.

It would appear unwise to consider only the "fuel" potential of the planted forests. Other potential uses of this biomass such as wood chips for paper products, may be economically more feasible.

The definition of "planted" forests is necessary. It is our understanding that "enrichment" plantings have occurred in native forests to augment the less vegetated areas. The use of these forests as biomass would probably not be appropriate. The use of "planted" forests which have been grown specifically for watershed conservation, erosion control, or wildlife habitat would similarly be inappropriate.

3. In reviewing paragraph 5 of HR 288, we have expressed concern over the requested evaluation being limited to "fuel" potential. In contrast, paragraph 6 of HR 288 concerns us in its too broad and undefined direction. Are the potential encumbrances or obstacles to be identified and removed, legal, physical, regulatory or of all types? The identification of such potential obstacles is essential. Their removal, however, may need to be most carefully evaluated in terms of overall social, environmental, and economic affects.